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2021 Harvest Olive Oil from the Marqués de Valdeueza

*Amazing flavor from a 1000-year-old family
business in western Spain*

It's not every day you get to buy a craft product from a family business in Spain that started up a thousand years ago. If you're looking for a

wonderful, world-class olive oil, you might well want to buy a bottle of the [Marqués de Valdueza](#) from the 2021 harvest. It arrived at the Deli last month, and it is truly delicious! I've loved their oil ever since I first visited the farm about ten years ago. Thanks to a series of small but very significant improvements to their process, it is now more special still!

You'll be hard-pressed to find any product that's a whole lot more rooted in family and national history than this. The family—formally known as the House of Álvarez de Toledo—has been a fixture in Spanish history for something like ten centuries. The farmland on which the olives grow was first worked by the family in 1624. If you're looking at a map, it's just west of the historic stone-walled town of Merida, roughly 25 miles or so east of the Portuguese border. Fadrique Álvarez de Toledo, who leads the family business today, is the 13th generation to formally carry the work forward. Fadrique has clearly found a passion for food and for making special things happen, a vocation that's manifested in all the work that he's put into making the Marqués de Valdueza oil as good as it is. Fadrique wrote to me recently to share his thoughts:

As you know, my family has been producing olive oil on our Perales de Valdueza estate for centuries now. The connection we have with the land and our implication and commitment to the local community has made our estate a landmark for the region. We believe that, if our products are good, it is made possible to a great degree by the land and community that have become an intimate part of my family's history and present-day activity, both culturally and economically. We are able to produce oils that are ever-improving thanks to the quality of the countryside in Extremadura and the people, some of whose families have worked with ours for generations. It is their diligent labor and knowledge that make the Marqués de Valdueza products possible.

Everything about the oil speaks to its excellence. The olives are all carefully picked by hand (olives don't do well with drama either). Harvesting is done quite early in the autumn, when yields are significantly lower, but the flavor of the oil is far more interesting. The trees are grown with much wider row spacing than most of the huge commercial farms that have been planted in the southern part of the country. As John Cancilla, who's joyfully and effectively worked with the family for decades now, explains, "This allows the wind to pass freely through the trees, reducing pests, and

the roots to spread naturally without being piled on top of the root system of the surrounding trees.” Most importantly, in the moment, the newly arrived Valdueza oil is exceptional. It’s made from a unique blend of four different varieties that grow on the farm—Hojiblanca, Picual, Arbequina, and the rare and unique to the region, Morisca. As good as the oil has been since I first tasted it ten years ago, the 2021 harvest is better still. It has a super fine long finish with well-balanced complexity. Fadrique shared:

Together with the tradition that forms the foundation of everything we do, we have invested in numerous technological innovations these last few years, both in the olive orchard and at the mill. We work very closely and on a continuous basis with some of the best olive oil experts in Spain, who have helped us tweak our equipment and processes in such a way as to shorten harvest and production times and reduce most of the friction in our system that generated heat and modified the organoleptic and chemical attributes of the oils. We also adjusted our filtering and decanting methods, so no organic materials that could cause anaerobic fermentation remain in the oils. We continue to keep our oils in nitrogen-flushed, stainless steel tanks and bottle it only when orders are received.

The Valdueza oil is very good, eaten simply, with [Paesano](#) or [Rustic Italian](#) bread from the Bakehouse. It’s great on salads (lots of local greens are coming in), on toast, and drizzled over [Piquillo](#) (or better still, [Cristal](#)) peppers. Oil of this quality is at its best when we use it to finish a dish—drizzle it over fresh fish straight from the broiler or just-sautéed local spinach. It’s amazing paired with the last of this spring’s asparagus and the first of the summer’s arugula. You can use it in chocolate dessert recipes instead of butter (0.75 part Marqués de Valdueza oil in place of one part butter) or on the Creamery’s vanilla gelato with a twist of Tellicherry black pepper. It’s also quite tasty with the lovely local strawberries on the market right now (really—it’s a stellar combination). If you want to sip it from a small glass as professional olive oil tasters would do, make a toast to the family that has continued to work to get better at all they do for ten centuries now. I feel fortunate to be a beneficiary of their very tasty work!